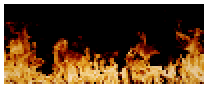
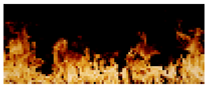
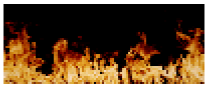
The Murder of Michael Servetus







Michael Servetus was a Christian living in the 1500's who incurred the wrath of John Calvin and was murdered by him and his cronies for illegitimate reasons. He was accused of heresy and railroaded through a mock trial and put to death being burned alive at the stake. Yet such an atrocity was praised by even well-known Calvinists as Bullinger and others for generations.

A couple of quotes from John Calvin himself of his unrepentant admission to his part in murdering Michael Servetus.

> *7 years before the incident:*
> *"If he [Servetus] comes [to Geneva], **I shall never let him go out alive** if my authority has weight."*
> *Written by John Calvin in a letter to Farel Feb. 13, 1546*
>
> *During the incident*
> *Again Calvin writes Farel in a letter dated Aug 20th 1553 where he has Servetus arrested.*
> *"We have now new business in hand with Servetus. He intended perhaps passing through this city; for it is not yet known with what design he came. But after he had been recognized, I thought that he should be detained. My friend Nicolas summoned him on a capital charge. ... **I hope that sentence of death will at least be passed upon him**"*
>
> *After the incident:*
> *"Many people have accused me of such ferocious cruelty that (they allege) **I would like to kill again the man I have destroyed.** Not only am I indifferent to their comments, but I rejoice in the fact that they spit in my face."*

"Whoever shall now contend that it is unjust to put heretics and blasphemers to death will knowingly and willingly incur their very guilt. (By way, Martin Luther wrote against putting "heretics" to death. So apparently Calvin was advocating murdering Luther as well)

The strongest recorded statement from Calvin on the Servetus affair is a 1561 letter from Calvin to the Marquis Paet, high chamberlain to the King of Navarre, in which he says intolerantly:

"Honour, glory, and riches shall be the reward of your pains; but above all, do not fail to rid the country of those scoundrels, who stir up the people to revolt against us. Such monsters should be exterminated, as ***I have exterminated Michael Servetus*** *the Spaniard."*

So as for Calvin it is written, *"Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and* ***you know that no murderer has eternal life in him****."* **1John 3:15**

Servetus' final words while being burned alive tied to a stake:

"Jesu, thou Son of the eternal God, have compassion upon me!"

Yet a heartless modern day Calvinist comments on this saying *"This phrase epitomizes the essence of his Trinitarian error"* for he said *"Son of the eternal God"* rather than *"eternal Son of God"*

Some Official Reasons for being burned alive:

- *Accused of teaching against infant baptism*
- *Accused of defaming John Calvin*
- *Accused of refraining from marriage for a "long time"*
- *Accused of denying the Trinity*

See Comprehensive List of Official Charges

Concerning his position on the Trinity

(See also http://www.godglorified.com/michael_servetus.htm)

There were many subtle nuances of describing the Trinity, especially at the time. In speaking on the Trinity, it was "Tri-Theism" that Servetus was really against. Concerning Servetus' position on the Trinity, consider his own statements and summaries of his teachings::

"I do not separate Christ from God any more than a voice from the speaker or <u>a ray from the sun</u> [writes Servetus]. Christ is in the Father as a voice from the speaker. He and the Father are as the ray and the sun are one light. An amazing mystery it is that God can thus be cojoined with man and man with God. A great wonder that God has taken to himself the body of Christ that it should be his peculiar dwelling place."

> *By the way this is the same analogy that an early church father Tertullian gives in defending the Trinity saying, "For God sent forth the Word, as the Paraclete also declares, just as the root puts forth the tree, and the fountain the river, and the sun the ray. ... Even when the ray is shot from the sun, it is still part of the parent mass; the sun will still be in the ray, because it is a ray of the sun-there is no division of substance, but merely an extension. Thus Christ is Spirit of Spirit, and God of God, as light of light is kindled." <u>Tertullian</u>*

"I shall admit these three things: first, this man is JESUS CHRIST; second, he is the Son of God; third, he is God."
http://www.geocities.com/Athens/8937/erroribus.htm

"Christ being one with God the Father, equal in power, came down from heaven and assumed flesh as a man."

CHRIST, the Son of man, who descended from heaven, was the Word by uttering which God created the world. He became flesh as God's firstborn, and was the Son of God. He was both human and divine. God's Spirit, moving all things, operates within us as the Holy Spirit, which is a person of the Godhead. It proceeds from the Son, not as a separate being but as a ministering spirit. It is holy, one of three persons in the Godhead, and sanctifies us by dwelling within us.

Examination of the Old Testament usage of the words for God - Elohim and Jehovah - shows that both refer to Christ, as centre of all, and the essence of all things.

The eternally begotten Son was a spoken word by which God made himself known. The Hebrew shows that the whole nature of God abode in Christ as Elohim, man being blended with God. The Word was a disposition of God, who begot the Son, a visible being. The Holy Spirit

also is a real being as Christ was. The Word was an actual being, creating all things, manifesting God in bodily form.

Servetus also acknowledges not writing clearly on this matter and thus his writings were misinterpreted, for which he apologizes here. His attitude shows to be far more Christlike than Calvin's bloodthirsty attitude:

> *All that I have lately written, in seven Books, against the received view as to the Trinity, honest reader, I now retract; not because it is untrue, but because it is incomplete, and written as though by a child for children. Yet I pray you to keep such of it as might help you to an understanding of what is to be said here. Moreover, that such a barbarous, confused,and incorrect book appear as my former one was, must be ascribed to my own lack of experience, and to the printer's carelessness. Nor would I have any Christian offended thereby, since God is wont sometimes to make his own wisdom known through the foolish instruments of the world. I beg you, therefore, to pay attention to the matter itself; for if you give heed to this, my halting words will not stand in your way. Fare you well.*

The actual source of theological confusion may have been because Servetus was not a professional theologian, but a doctor. And thus the theological terms used to describe God may have had different meanings between himself and the reformed theologians. In particular it appears in his writings that he uses word "hypostasis" differently than the theologians did. For in medical terminology a "hypostasis" is the settling of blood in the lower part of an organ or the body as a result of decreased blood flow, or more generally A settling of solid particles in a fluid. But there are other definitions of this term:

> *1. Philosophy. The substance, essence, or underlying reality.*
> *2. Theology a. Any of the persons of the Trinity. b. The essential person of Jesus in which his human and divine natures are united.*

To Servetus, Jesus Christ was the only "hypostatis" of the Godhead in that he was the only outward manifestation - using more of the medical sense - as light is to the sun. Thus to say that each person of the Trinity was a "hypostatis" to Servetus meant more of a three-headed God - tri-theism, which he appropriately rejected. But I think this was a misunderstanding of theological terminology and less a disagreement of concepts.

But Calvin was simply too proud and hostile to try to understand Servetus. And Servetus was too unlearned when it came to theological terminology, of which

he seemed to become more aware as his apology above reveals. But it was too late. Calvin was out for blood.

There is little doubt that Servetus was a Christian, but one who was purposely misinterpreted by his accusers so as to railroad him through a mock trial in order to murder him. Servetus was refused an advocate at the trial, being told with grim humor that he could lie well enough without one and was not allowed to answer a number of charges against him.

In fact in his book "CALVIN AND HIS ENEMIES" Rev. Thomas Smyth D.D admits that Servetus was not really condemned because of his doctrine, but because of the manner in which he maintained them. Meaning that he was not a man-pleaser, but spoke his opinion without respect of persons, speaking even in a condescending and common manner (much as Jesus did). In this way he offended the religious elite (much as Jesus had) and was condemned to death not because of his doctrine, but because he humiliated the proud. Yet many Calvinists simply place the blame on Servetus. *“If ever a poor fanatic thrust himself into the fire,”* says J. T. Coleridge, *“it was Michael Servetus.”* While they strive to hold John Calvin as the victim of circumstance.

This is an example not uncommon of how even popular institutional leaders in the church can end up committing atrocious crimes. Because of their elitist attitude, they cannot handle humiliation and thus react with even bloodthirsty hostility. Christ's death was one example, and Servetus' another.